

What's A Sports Fan Anyway:

Combatting the Masculine Hegemony of Sports Fan Culture

Website Link: [Explain It to Me Sports](#)

Emily Shmyr

Department of Media and Communication, University of Guelph-Humber

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Dr. Natalie Evans

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When looking at mainstream sports media, different sources present their content in unique ways. Yet, despite their differences, they all have the same driving force, the fans. Regardless of the sport, fans are passionate individuals who put their heart and soul into cheering for the athletes they love. Regardless of the enthusiasm seen for sports, the fandom that encompasses it has historically been a toxic masculine environment which discourages engagement from other fans. Through the use of this alternative media, the source will demonstrate how the toxic masculinity and double standards of the sports fandom can be transformed into a fan environment that is acceptable to all. The following will outline the background behind toxic sports fan culture and how this alternative media source works to combat it.

In a study by Hoeber and Kerwin, they discovered that in sports there is a hegemonic masculinity where sports are seen as a masculine institution (2013). Due to the environment, it invoked a sense that men's involvement, skills and privileges in sports are seen as natural and superior, while female fans were deemed "middle-class and inauthentic supporters," (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013). In the same study, they found that in North America women account for more than half of the sport spectator and consumer population, but sports fandom is still seen as a male activity (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013).. When a woman does declare themselves as a sports fan they are often criticized and given a negative perception in comparison to men. According to one study by Crawford and Gosling, instead of considering women as sports fans due to their enjoyment of the sport, they were viewed as "silly little girls who demonstrate little knowledge or commitment to their team," (Pope, 2014). In connection, sports fandom also creates a double standard between men and women. Females must prove their status and identity as authentic fans while men are rarely questioned or required to do so. Not only are female fans questioned for

their authenticity in sports fandom, but they are also categorized by their perceived intentions when it comes to sports. One of the biggest double standards towards women in sports fandom is that their enjoyment of the game comes from the “sexual attractiveness of star players,” (Pope, 2014). Yet with male sports fans, their intentions are never negotiated and deemed as natural. Even in mainstream sports media, there are elements of this toxic environment. When looking at sports news there is often a presumed male audience as evident by the commercials in between segments which are driven toward a male perspective. Similarly, the content of online media presents additional challenges outside of the double-standard fandom. Primarily online sports news includes articles that do not explain to newcomers about the sport. They present news in a manner where it is assumed their audience has preconceived knowledge about the sport they are discussing. It almost insinuates the ideals seen in sports fandom where “a man is a sports fan unless he says he is not” (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013). Regardless of the perceived neutrality of online sports media, these outlets have no open source to provide explanations on how certain sports work. In connection to the masculine hegemony in sports fandom, it closes the doors for individuals regardless of gender wanting to learn about how sports work due to the fear of ridicule or condensing explanations.

Keeping this in mind, the inspiration for this alternative media source came from a TikTok user named Lydia, who used her platform to share a female perspective of being a Formula One fan. On her page, she has shared a few videos regarding how in comparison to male fans, female fans are often diminished as being real F1 fans because others deem their interest as being only due to how the drivers look (@live.laugh.lydia, 2022). The TikTok platform also provided additional inspiration with the videos made by other female sports fans, who expressed similar notions regarding other sports. Outside of TikTok the other inspiration for

this source came from a news outlet called *The Gist*. This online news website provides all types of sports news for both male and female athletes, but the entire website is run by a female team. The website's intention was to create a media source that stepped away from the “mansplaining” nature of sports news (The Gist, 2019). With this inspiration in mind, this alternative media source was born as a combination of both online sports news and social media fan interaction. *Explain It to Me Sports* works to include neutral and easy-to-understand sports news that is open for anyone to read. Its website medium is based on traditional online sports news but has been altered to fit a new model of media. The website also features a sports explanation page which provides an in-depth but basic introduction to how certain sports work. It provides an easy-access source for fans wishing to learn without having to fear ridicule or condescendence. In connection to both news and explanation, the website also includes additional tabs of communication and sources to further expand the platform in order to implement a safe, open, and inclusive environment for all sports fans. The purpose of this website holds to what John D.H. Downing described as radical media. Through this media source and its elements, the hope is to provide an alternative outlook to sports news and fandom that combats the current hegemonic masculine culture and transforms it into an inclusive environment where everyone is worthy to be a fan (Atton, 2002).

Although this hegemonic masculinity of sports fandom has not been brought into the limelight by mainstream platforms, the use of alternative media is working slowly to bring about change. Through the use of this platform, transformation to sports fandom can be made to create environments for all fans. By doing so sports fandom can switch to an outlet for all fans to express their enthusiasm and cheer on their favourite athletes without feeling like they are being

ridiculed or that they need to prove themselves. Alternative media presents a step in the right direction for ensuring that the only conflict seen between fans lies within team rivalry.

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